

HARVARD UNIVERSITY
CENTER FOR SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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John F. Kennedy School of Government
79 John F. Kennedy Street
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August 29, 1987

Dr. Daniel Ellsberg

Dear Dan:

My wife Janet told me last night that she had a very tough time keeping her conversation with you down to about an hour, and that, furthermore, she thought the conversation had to end quite prematurely. I am not surprised. After close to five hours on the horn with you the other day, and after taking--believe it or not--over ^{twenty} pages of notes during the conversation, I still felt that we had only scratched the surface. I came away with one absolutely certain conclusion: That you are totally convinced that the Cuban takeover occurred and that this event was crucial, perhaps even decisive, in the resolution of the Cuban missile crisis. As I told you then, and as I suppose must have been obvious from your very close reading of my manuscript, the event you believe occurred on October 26-27, 1962 would indeed explain a good deal that I have been unable to account for. That is exactly the event that would, or should, have happened in order to make the quite unexpected and amicable resolution of the missile crisis ~~not~~ occur. It is the missing piece of the puzzle, or at any rate, the most important missing piece I have heard of. And that is saying something, because as you are aware, the Cuban missile crisis has lately assumed all the drama and immediacy of contemporary affairs, due to a whole series of revelations lately come to light: From Rusk, from the transcription of the secret tapes of the EXCOMM meetings of October 27, and now this, the Ellsberg Revelation, potentially the most significant of all.

I take it that Janet shared with you some of the results of my preliminary conversations with Joe Nye and Dave Welch about bringing you out to Harvard, to CSIA and the Kennedy School, to break this news to the public. So, forgive me if I go over some familiar ground, but I think it is vitally important to get straight just what I think we ought to do, and why.

First, let me recapitulate the point on which all of agree-- you, me, Joe and Dave. First, if true, this revelation will do at least two things: It will give us the first interesting insight into the Soviet calculations in the CMC since Khrushchev's memoirs - which were brought to light in the early 70s; and second, it will in fundamental ways revolutionize our understanding of nuclear danger in the CMC and of those factors which actually allowed us to slip out of October 1962 without a war. There was no argument on this whatever. I regard this as basic: That a group of highly intelligent and well informed people on the CMC believe that the Ellsberg Revelation is terribly important. Second, if true, there really is only one place at which such information ought to be revealed, and that is here, at the Kennedy School, where Graham wrote his book, where the May Group debated the crisis all through the 60s, where International Security is published, and in the pages of which virtually every interesting new revelation on the CMC has first seen light of day and, finally, where at present more work on the CMC is going on than in the next half dozen most active institutions put together. (This year, we will have a working group meeting every other week solely to discuss and evaluate the new evidence coming to light about the crisis. This group will have nearly a dozen and a half scholars who are true-blue junkies of the CMC, led by the greatest addict of all, yours truly). Again, not a shred of disagreement here. This is the place. Third, we all agreed that any "revelation" that takes place here ought to be very carefully orchestrated and well thought out, and for reasons that you, more than anyone, ought to appreciate: We want to approach this, and we want it to be understood that we are approaching this, with utmost seriousness. This is to be fundamentally a scholarly event, like our conference in Hawk's Cay was a scholarly event (despite the rather high society treatment given it in yesterday's Times Magazine cover piece by Tony Lukas). Of course, we will also want to contact a goodly portion of the 60 or so media people we always contact when we feel we have a newsworthy item for them, but we want the whole atmosphere to be very serious and scholarly. The media will sensationalize it enough, without any help from us. Fourth, and finally, we should think in terms of a published product in International Security, along the lines we discussed, and which I will describe in more detail below. The bottom line, Dan, is that you/we were taken very seriously, and that door is contingently open to you.

But there are contingencies. Let me spell out the most important ones first, before stating my own views as to the exact time and format in which we ought to try ^{to} do this. The basic problem, as you know, is that no one but you knows about this. This gives the story its marvelous appeal and importance, after all these years, but it has also caused many people whom I know to be very suspicious. My own impression is that they are somewhat suspicious. Part of this, as expressed by Kaysen, Garthoff and Hyland, is that

they just do not believe the event in question actually happened. you are fighting against nearly a quarter-century of thinking that has gone on without this piece of information, and explanations have been put forward by learned people who have become quite comfortable with their hypotheses and quite convinced that they are right. This is only natural, of course. But I think there are two other problems that you and I have to deal with. You know what they are but let me just remind you of them, for the record. First, Garthoff and Hyland (to take people who have an awful lot of credibility and experience in intelligence matters) find it almost inconceivable that an event of this magnitude and astronomical significance could have occurred and be known only to one person. I think this, more than anything else, is what they find hard to swallow, in advance of seeing the evidence. Bill Hyland told me matter of factly that "it didn't happen; it is a fantasy." And Ray Garthoff, as usual more reticent in his appraisal, said he "knows of no evidence for its having happened." Joe Nye, himself a former Undersecretary of State for a very sensitive issue--non-proliferation--expressed skepticism on these grounds. How, he asked, could only one person "know" such a thing? He said this would be like only one person knowing that, say, the Israelis have nuclear weapons. But this leads directly to the final problem, which you know: Your reputation, undeserved perhaps but nevertheless real in strategic environs, as a person drawn to causes and a person who might make (as Rusk recently accused me in the Times) of making a mountain out of a molehill.* I ought to add that this never came up in discussion with Joe and Dave. Their own skepticism was purely of the variety expressed by Hyland and Garthoff: How in the hell could you and you alone be party to this kind of information? You know all this, of course. But I wanted you to know how these by now familiar arguments played out in the discussions I had with my people here this week.

This leads straightaway to the beginning of a solution, which I understand Janet relayed to you. Roughly, it is this: We need--to receive as soon and as completely as possible the evidence on which your conclusions are based. Furthermore, I need your clearance to discuss, if not to share (though sharing would be better, in my view) this evidence with people whose views on these sorts of questions I trust. These would include Tom Schelling, Dick Neustadt, Bill Hyland, Ray Garthoff, Carl Kaysen and perhaps Bill Taubman (the fellow from Amherst who is writing a "definitive" biography in English of Khrushchev). That would be pretty good group, and I gather from our conversation, and what Janet relayed to me about hers with you, that some such group would be OK with you too. If, therefore, I and my colleagues Joe Nye and Dave Welch become convinced that what we have here is indeed, as you hold, a serious and reasonably convincing argument, one that fully deserves our scholarly attention, then the way will be cleared for beginning to discuss how to break the news in a scholarly forum here at the Kennedy School of Government.

Written after

1968? (After RFK)

* leap to conclusions helpful to my cause (and damaging to theirs).

"Kenneth: The President"

I think both of us are agreed, and I think we are exactly right, to assume that this information ought to brought to the world's attention sometime in October, 1987, on the 25th anniversary of the CMC. As an aside, let me say that I spent almost 10 hours on the phone yesterday talking to people who had seen the Times on the Rusk Revelation and I am astonished at just how much attention this anniversary is going to get. Dan, it is going to be positively massive. Archives, TV stations, newspaper chains, NPR, PBS the BBC, the networks, and on and on. All of these people have been calling to ask about how the Rusk thing might fit with events and publications and show that are already well in train. Thus our intuitions have been right all along: Interest in this event will peak in late October of this year. That is when your revelation should come out. After the Times piece by Lukas, and after the Foreign Affairs piece by Joe, Dave and I a couple of weeks later, I think the stage will be set.

Let me reiterate why I absolutely do not think that your information ought to be brought out in a way that connects it with the US-Soviet meeting we are planning October 12-13. There are two reasons. First, honestly, we have no firm idea whether this event is actually going to occur. The Soviets have not responded in a way that gives me confidence. And now there is talk of a summit just before the November 7 celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. All the Soviets we have invited will be part of that summit stuff, and thus we may have to abort at the last minute. We are unlikely to know until late September. Second, and far more to the point, these discussions are to be the very first ever conducted of this sort. They will necessarily be general and circumspect. Let me give you an example of what we are looking for. If we ask the question: What caused the Cuban missile crisis, we hear two answers--the Cuban missiles, and the Bay of Pigs. What we want to do in the single day in which these conversations will occur is to begin to understand one another's perspectives. That is about it and even that, if experience is any guide, will be hard as hell. Joe said, and I agree (as I think you did when we talked) that an astonishing revelation such as yours, one with such impact on our view of history and on the Soviet's public relations between themselves and their Cuban allies, will positively swamp anything else we might want to do. So, we all agreed that your revelation ought not only to be treated separately, it ought to come after the conference.

OK. Let me, on the basis of these considerations offer you the following scenario to chew on.

1. You send to me as quickly and completely as you deem necessary some of the evidence and arguments for the credibility of what you would claim as fact in your presentation here.

2. You give me permission to consult with some of the people mentioned previously, namely Schelling, Kaysen, Garthoff, Hyland and perhaps Taubman.

3. If I am convinced following consulting these people not that you are necessarily correct, but only that this is a set of documents and arguments that warrants serious discussion, then we invite you to CSIA and The Kennedy School of Government to deliver a public lecture.

4. The lecture would take place, probably, on Monday, October 26, 1987, exactly 25 years to the day after which the event in question occurred. This would give the media present time to get their stories out either for the following day, the fateful 27th, or the day after, which is the 25th anniversary of the resolution of the crisis.

5. The meeting would take place in the Penthouse of the Kennedy School of Government, moderated by Graham Allison or Joe Nye.

6. The meeting would be attended by invitation only, by about 60 or so people, making up the cream of the Cambridge arms control community, which includes most of the people who know the most about the events in question.

7. We will arrange to invite some special guests, such as Garthoff, Hyland, et al.

8. The format would allow you to speak for approximately one hour, followed by about 2 hours or more of discussion. We would agree on a list of a half-dozen or so people who would be given first crack, and on this list would be Schelling, Neustadt, Garthoff and probably Allison. We could negotiate about others.

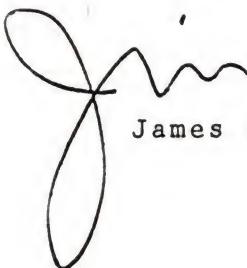
9. We would invite a selective list of media people, from the Times, Post, the networks, PBS and NPR and so on--our usual list. We ought also to have something like a 5-10 page brief that we can distribute ahead of time so that they will get some appreciation of what they are about to be told.

10. The meeting will be tape recorded. I will edit the proceedings following which, you and I will collaborate on putting together a finished product that we submit to International Security for publication. This ought to put the seal of scholarly approval on it for good. We will have launched one of the most interesting phases of discussion about the CMC on record.

As we all saw yesterday, much to my surprise, the Rusk revelation warranted page one on the Times. One can only guess what your revelation will warrant but, coming on the exact anniversary 25 years after the events in question, and after the public has been alerted to the significance of the anniversary about to pass, I would be very optimistic about your having to hold some kind of news conference after the scholarly meeting. I think both aspects are important: The scholarly-ness of the meeting, and the news conference. I know from speaking to you that you have many personal reasons for also believing this. And for my own part, I can, if I take an optimistic slant on things, see this as the beginning of some sort of commitment, mutual and important, between this Center and Dan Ellsberg. Of course, I must leave that vague for now, because we haven't passed the all important hurdle of convincing a skeptical scholarly community--at least convincing them that this is very serious indeed. Anything you can do, and speedily, to help me in this, can only help. If we are shooting for the 25th anniversary, and if we are shooting for the Kennedy School and the audience you and I both want to evaluate your claims, then we really much move fast. I am for my part willing to do whatever I can. This is too important to let slide. I am your willing partner in getting the truth out, to the best of my ability.

I will try to call you at around 3:30 PM or so, California time, on Monday, which ought to be the day this letter arrives at your home. Janet sends her very best. I look forward to our conversation.

Sincerely,



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